

BOOK REVIEWS

Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong (ed.). *Themes in West Africa's History*. Athens: Ohio University Press. 2006.

Themes in West Africa's History is an impressive book. The thirteen well-organized essays essentially represent various aspects of West African history from the pre-colonial to the contemporary periods. These essays are key learning tools towards an overall understanding West African history. Additionally, the authors' interdisciplinary approach as well as their focus on new themes make the book totally different from conventional history books on West Africa. The book's objective is to discuss "various disciplinary approaches to West African history, providing overviews of the literature on major topics, and breaking new ground through the incorporation of original research." The contributors accomplish this objective through thorough research and lucid presentations.

Divided into three parts, the book examines new themes that are often not well taught due to a lack of research and knowledge. Part I chapters are inter-connected with the focus on the prehistory, ecology, culture, language, and oral traditions of West Africa. Part II discusses topics on environment, the slave trade, class and caste systems, religious interactions, diseases, poverty, and urbanization. Finally, Part III considers some contemporary issues such as the political economy of West Africa, structural adjustment, military intervention in politics, ethnic conflicts, and the intermingling of religion and culture, especially Pentecostalism and Islam. All are basic ideas for a better understanding of the overall history of West Africa. The themes are well connected and the smooth transition from one theme to another is one of the book's strengths. Another strong area is that the essays are rich in sources and detailed notes. This is evidence of comprehensive research on each of the themes discussed. Aside from the references, each chapter contains recommended sources for further reading that provide an opportunity for further investigation.

Unlike eastern and southern Africa, where hominid fossil finds have proven the ancientness of humans in Africa, such discoveries are lacking for West Africa. Artifacts of material culture, however, provide convincing archaeological evidence of human life and activities in West Africa over the last 10,000 years. Climatic changes have occurred, but food production in the savanna and forest regions has consistently supported a steadily growing population. The development of the Neolithic revolution that brought

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v11/v11i1reviews.pdf>

about a change from subsistence economy to cultivation of crops, the growth of commerce, and the favorable environmental and living conditions gave rise to urbanization as well as socio-political interactions within the region. All of these factors contributed to the emergence of great empires in West Africa. As an important and integral part of the history of West Africa, it would be necessary to refer to the empires and how the geography of the region contributed to their rise and growth.

Oral traditions pervade West African culture and history. While the focus in this book is on the different dimensions of oral traditions among the Manding peoples, it is important to show that oral traditions existed in other West African cultural settings. For example, the *ba-gesere* in Borgu and the *arokin* in Yorubaland perform the same functions of palace historians in their respective societies. As well, the pride of “the power of the brain” and the reliance on memory (since writing was not developed in West African civilization) was commonplace throughout the region. Thus, there is tremendous historical knowledge to be gained in oral tradition. Readers should be fully aware of the prevalence of such historical traditions in West Africa.

The colonial period brought about some significant political, economic, and social changes in West Africa. This period and the profound changes that accompanied it cannot be overlooked. Not much was written about this period, which provides a useful link between the pre-colonial and contemporary times. Because West African states inherited a weak economic base from their colonial masters, they have been struggling economically since independence. The mono-economic style in which the British and French made Africans specialize in producing specific cash crops turned out to be a negative economic legacy. Lacking industrial and technological capability to tap mineral resources, Africans have been forced to depend largely on their former colonial powers for economic support. West African states are importers rather than exporters. Hence, they have resorted to taking loans from international financial institutions (IFIs) to revamp their economy. Instead of improving, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) has actually sapped their economies. Through this neocolonial economic experience, poverty has become a major problem. As the book suggests, however, West African countries must cultivate the culture of a sustainable economy through meaningful and relevant projects. The weak economy West African states are experiencing is closely linked with the growth of diseases and poor health conditions. As governments endeavor to address economic problems, they must also provide better health services for the people who constitute the workforce.

The book is unique, interesting, and illuminating. It overflows with anthropological, cultural, and historical information. Contemporary issues such as ethnic conflicts and the growing influence of religion on politics add flavor to the richness and uniqueness of the book. The writing is clear, understandable, and concise. Emmanuel Akyeampong has done an excellent job putting together a volume that provides high quality analysis. The authors have done a commendable job explaining

some difficult concepts which in turn makes the book comprehensible to ordinary readers. This book will be very helpful and enlightening to general readers, undergraduate and graduate students of West African history and anthropology.

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Mark Bradbury. *Becoming Somaliland*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press/Progressio, 2008.

In recent years, the news from the Horn of Africa reported in the US media has rarely been positive; piracy, possible terrorism, and dangerous conditions for foreign aid workers seem to be the typical topics. Thus, the publication of Mark Bradbury's recent book on the Somaliland question is cause for cautious optimism. Bradbury, who has worked in London and Somalia/Somaliland since 1988 with organizations including ActionAid Somalia, has extensive experience with the region and has written a helpful book that traces the history of Somaliland from the nineteenth century and even earlier to the present day. The author clearly recognizes the controversial nature of the Somaliland question, noting the "diplomatic limbo" (p. 256) Somaliland has experienced over the past sixteen years resulting in part from the fact its sovereignty is not recognized by any foreign country. Indeed, certainly a number of Somalis hold on to the hope that one day a unified Somalia can be achieved from the five regions where Somalis live that were divided apart in the nineteenth century— then known as the British Somaliland Protectorate, Italian Somalia, Cote Francais des Somaliens (Djibouti), the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, and the Abyssinian Empire of Menelik II (p. 24).

At any rate, regardless of the reader's views on the Somaliland question, this book is an essential read for those interested in the sociocultural and political background of the region and the case for nationhood (For a critical view of the Somaliland question, read Roble, 2007). In addition to describing Somaliland's history, the author does detail a number of success stories in modern Somaliland, particularly with regard to issues of self-determination, self-reliance, and infrastructure development (such as the restoration of utilities and the creation of phone and world-wide web systems). While noting important differences between the north and south of the Somali region, Bradbury hints that there are valuable lessons to be learned from Somaliland that may point the way to a solution to the troubles that have plagued the south. In particular, he emphasizes the importance of self-determinism, the need for governing structures to

reflect local and historical systems in culturally sensitive ways, and the risks of relying too deeply upon foreign aid.

In 1991, the leadership of the Somali National Movement (SNM) and northern clan elders announced the withdrawal of a new state, the Republic of Somaliland, from what had been a union since 1960 of the colonial territories of Italian Somalia and British Somaliland Protectorate. Bradbury, however, traces the history of the region back much earlier. For instance, far from separatism being a phenomenon known only to the late twentieth century civil war and later, in the 1930s, chauvinistic sentiments were strong after the British defeat of Sayyid Md. Abdulla Hassan and his Dervish army. Of course, more proximal causes of the present situation include the Ethiopian war of the 1970s and the actions of the Barre regime towards the north and the resulting resentments and hostilities among certain clan groups and lineages, especially the Isaaq. Today about three million live in Somaliland, and many more if one includes those outside of Somaliland in the Diaspora.

An understanding of the various clans and groups in Somaliland and Somalia is absolutely essential to an understanding of the region. While focusing primarily on the numeric and political majority in Somaliland, the Isaaq, Bradbury offers numerous charts and tables and narrative concerning the changing and evolving alliances and hostilities between such other clans as the Darood (Dhulbahante and Warsengeli), Gadabursi, 'Iise, Hawiye and other minorities such as the Gaboye, Somali-Arabs, Jibrahil, and Gugure. Bradbury shows sensitivity to the diversity within the Isaaq clan family as well, noting the changing representation from groups including the Habar Aawl (Sa'ad Muse and 'Iise Muse), Garhajis, and Habar Ja'lo. A strength of the book is Bradbury's understanding that coming to terms with Somaliland requires a keen sensitivity to both colonial/contemporary political systems and traditional cultural systems including xeer, diya paying groups, and the clan system in general. Additionally, he rightly notes that in their focus on kinship, some scholars have neglected the importance of Islam.

While Bradbury does not offer a separate chapter on women's issues, he does offer sensitive insights into the evolving nature of women's roles throughout his book. For instance, women are the major recipients of remittances in Somaliland, a fact that greatly increases their economic role (p. 250). Furthermore, women featured prominently in the refugee camp experience, and due to the dearth of men, by necessity they engaged in business and other employment outside the home. Politically women played important roles in the peacemaking process and as gatherers of intelligence. As Bradbury notes, "a woman's dual kinship ties to her paternal clan and to affinal relatives in her husband's clan would enable her to act as an ambassador and channel of communication between warring parties and to cross from one territory to another" (p. 104). While progress towards equality has been made, there is much room for further gains. For instance, in 2002, while the Harmood party pledged to appoint a woman as

deputy chairperson and to guarantee that fifty percent of the candidates were women, such promises were not kept. Nevertheless since 2002, there have been three women in the cabinet and two as district councilors (p. 207). As another sign of change, Edna Adan, a former wife of President Egal, was an advocate against female genital mutilation (p. 156).

In sum, whether Somaliland will realize its dream of *nabad iyo caano* (peace and milk) or disintegrate into *'ol iyo abaar* (conflict and drought) remains an unanswered question. Among the important factors will be the stance of the developing cohort who were born post-1988, a generation who has never known a united Somalia. Will these young people staunchly embrace independence, yearn for a unified state, or, in some as yet unforeseen way, creatively add to a project in progress?

Reference

F. Roble. "Local and Global Norms: Challenges to 'Somaliland's Unilateral Secession.'" *Horn of Africa*. Vol. 25 (2007): 1-19. Retrieved 01/01/09 from <http://hornofafrica.newark.rutgers.edu>.

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Christopher Rowan. *The Politics of Water in Africa: The European Union's Role in Development AID Partnership*. London: International Library of African Studies 24--Tauris Academic Studies, 2009.

The author makes it clear where he stands: "I suggest that the discourse of partnership is used to put a glossy veneer on a relationship that is less about partnership and more about a hegemonic partner using its financial power to dictate terms to aid recipients" (p. 1). This volume then proceeds to examine how the European Union (EU) falls short of stated objectives to engage in partnership with developing countries, especially the ACP Group (the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, associated with the industrialized group, the G8). The author starts with a document from the Stockholm International Water Institute entitled *Water and Development in the Developing Countries—A Study Commissioned by the European Parliament* (SIWI Report 10, 2000) and builds his case for non-partnership.

Chapter 1 (What of Water?) identifies water as a human right, drawing upon international pronouncements regarding this resource. Water is, of course, highly symbolic, charged with social importance given its role in human health, in creating

community, and promoting personal dignity. Yet (as the author does not emphasize) it is also a commodity, requiring water resource management, investment, institutions, and incentives. It is helpful to see someone survey the evolution of documents, statements, and rhetoric surrounding the topic, since such background information provides a context for examining interactions between the EU and developing countries. The author, however, does not explore links between the actual amount of aid and water sector performance across countries—a natural question for anyone interested in going beyond process to the actual impact of “partnerships.”

Chapter 2 (Friends or Foes?) proceeds to summarize the literature on the EU and Africa, focusing on the extent to which different scholars and observers saw the relationship as reflecting uneven power: Rowan finds that public documents identified principles that were not followed in practice. Other organizations, such as Wateraid, Oxfam, and Eurostep (nongovernmental development organizations) are referred to supporting principles which the EU did not always practice. Then the author reviews political theories of partnership from Hobbes (leviathan and a one-sided partnership), Locke (balanced relationship), Rousseau (emphasizing a covenantal association), and some African leaders (Nkrumah, Nyerere, and others).

Chapter 3 (Development or Dictatorship?) contrasts neoliberal globalization (and hegemony) with “partnership.” It would have helped to have a table listing key agreements (such as the Cotonou Agreement, Benin, 2000) to give the reader a clear sense of both the sequence of pronouncements and an encapsulation of key features—helping others understand the evolution of public documents.

Chapter 4 (The Partnerships) was the most interesting for this reviewer. The “partnerships” between Lesotho and Brussels and Mozambique and Brussels are explored, respectively, through ten and five interviews. In addition, Appendix 1 provides further details regarding each interview. Of course, such a sample size implies that the conclusions will be somewhat impressionistic, though the author seems to draw reasonable inferences from these meetings. What seemed lacking again were figures that identified the different stakeholder groups, including those who were not represented in the sample. It would help to have the institutional frameworks laid out clearly for readers.

The remaining chapters critique EU rhetoric, suggest next steps to overcome the asymmetric relationship, review the Cotonou Agreement, and provide concluding observations. One looks in vain for data on trends in water coverage in a number of countries and a test of the impact of EU support on sector performance in different countries. In a sense, the book is not really about all of Africa since it draws conclusions from two specific settings. A broader brush might have revealed more complex patterns. For example, had GTZ (the German aid agency, Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) aid in Uganda been one of the case studies, the author might have drawn other lessons about how water managers and political leaders responded to

externally-driven initiatives. References to the numerous studies appearing in policy journals about sector performance in other African nations would have added much to the book (see Mugisha and Brown, "From Despair to Promise: A Comparative Analysis of WSS Reforms in East African Cities," *Water Policy*, forthcoming).

Furthermore, other initiatives might have been given more attention by the author. It would have been useful to include more references to studies and projects funded by the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), a multi-donor partnership created in 1978 and administered by the World Bank. This technical assistance program has developed strategies for obtaining affordable access to safe water and sanitation services. Similarly, the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education (Delft) has extensive experience in capacity-building in Africa. Inclusion of such programs would have made the book more useful for those evaluating relationships between EU nations and Africa.

Ultimately, this reviewer read the book through an "economic" lens—which means that I may have missed contributions to debates within political science, public administration, and international relations. Nevertheless, those seeking insight on water in Africa will want to cast a wider net. For example, Matthias Krause's 2009 book *The Political Economy of Water and Sanitation* (Routledge Studies in Development and Society) captures better the issues of equity and efficiency facing policy-makers and service providers in developing countries. Krause's fourteen-page bibliography provides a much more complete set of resources than Rowan's five page listing of references, though the latter book is more tightly focused. In conclusion, Rowan provides some fresh perspectives regarding the evolution of EU policy, drawing upon documents and a set of interesting interviews.

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Robert J. Thornton. *Unimagined Community: Sex, Networks, and AIDS in Uganda and South Africa*. London: The Regents of the University of California, 2008.

In the age of increasingly self-congratulatory and highly moralizing international HIV/AIDS interventions such as Bush's PEPFAR (The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Reduction), Robert J. Thornton's *Unimagined Communities* offers fresh anthropological insight into the conundrums of AIDS epidemiology. Thornton's research for this book started with a contradictory observation: why did HIV prevalence fall in Uganda while this poor country's fertility rate continued to climb, while at the same time, HIV prevalence has risen dramatically in South Africa, one of the continent's wealthiest countries with the lowest fertility rate? Scientific explanations and behavior

change approaches to HIV prevention like ABC (abstinence, be faithful, use condoms) did not satisfy Thornton. So, he set out to explain the contrasting trends in Uganda and South Africa from a different angle: sexual networks. “My principal finding,” Thornton writes, “is that change in HIV prevalence is primarily determined by the difference in the configuration of large-scale sexual networks rather than the cumulative effect of behavior change, a necessary but not sufficient condition” (p. 1).

Thornton achieves his principal finding by contrasting the late twentieth-century histories of the two countries as well as examining social attitudes toward sex, disease, land, mobility, and status that characterize the rise and fall of HIV prevalence in Uganda and South Africa. Because of the secretive nature of sex as a social relationship, the vast networks of people linked by sexual activity remain ‘unimagined communities’ (to contrast with Benedict Anderson’s notion of the nation as an imagined community) in which “...the sexual network is never imagined and never represented by those who do in fact participate in it” (p. xx). Thus sexually-transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS can easily flourish. The good news: understanding that sexual networks rather than individual behavior are what drive HIV prevalence can change the course of the AIDS epidemic. The bad news: prevention and treatment programs designed to do so have thus far failed horribly—and possibly contributed to the rapid transmission of the disease—by focusing instead on highly charged moral discourses of individual behavior. Further, Thornton’s explanation AIDS reduction in Uganda intimates that this may have been more an accident of historical events than a result of a conscious effort on the part of the government and the citizenry. He suggests, in fact, that the political instability in Uganda in the 70s and 80s may have contributed to the decline of HIV rates in the early 90s by limiting the scope of sexual networks to highly localized environments. That fact makes Uganda’s success in reversing its HIV prevalence rate much less replicable in places such as South Africa with very different social landscapes.

Still, Thornton’s intriguing theory reminds us, importantly, that AIDS is a complex socially transmitted disease whose spread is reliant on historical and cultural factors as much as epidemiology. In the process, he exposes political motives of various prevention and treatment aid projects that have, at best, contributed only a small part to AIDS relief, while at worst exacerbating the problem. It is thus important that this book comes out at this historical moment. Between the neoconservative Bush era of AIDS intervention and the Pope’s statements on the ineffectiveness of condoms during his 2009 visit to Africa, Thornton’s claims that moralizing solutions have gotten us nowhere in the fight against AIDS only gain more contemporary salience.

The book’s only notable drawback is that it sometimes lacks systematically gathered ethnographic evidence (many of Thornton’s ethnographic examples are anecdotal). Instead, Thornton makes rather sweeping statements about widespread cultural beliefs. More ethnographic evidence could have provided richer detail to

illustrate points as it bolstered arguments to help substantiate Thornton's claims, rather than running the risk of essentializing very diverse attitudes and beliefs. As it stands, however, *Unimagined Community* provides both reasonable explanations for why HIV reduction programs have failed and practical prevention solutions based on a well developed sexual network theory. Scholars and practitioners would do well to familiarize themselves with Thornton's anthropological approach to understanding HIV transmission.

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Cheikh Anta Babou. *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadou Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007.

Amadou Bamba M'Backe, founder of the Muslim Sufi brotherhood known as the Muridiyya, was born in western Senegal in 1850, at the beginning of concerted French colonization of the region. By the time of his death in 1927, when the French had consolidated their control, Bamba had established a widespread following and a reputation, both among colonial administrators and local leaders, as perhaps the single most powerful force in Senegalese religious and political history. Bamba's life story, as well as his complex, fluid, and ambiguous relations with secular authorities, have been well-documented and examined in both contemporary and historical accounts, creating a cottage industry within West African studies. An abundant hagiographical literature exists on Bamba, and his followers continue to write and speak about his life, practices, and ideas. Because of the lasting and visible influence of Amadu Bamba and the Murids in colonial and independent Senegal, as well as the rather distinct and, some would argue, unorthodox practices of the Muridiyya, scholars from various disciplines have mined the extensive and readily available relevant archives, oral sources, and secondary literature.

To justify another narrative historical account of the life of Amadu Bamba and the early years of the brotherhood, Babou sets out to examine not only the conventional sources, but previously neglected internal documents, including works in Wolof and Arabic, as well as oral interviews the author conducted with Murid members. The author notes that previous studies have focused primarily on state building and the question of whether Bamba qualifies as a resistor or collaborator with colonial authorities. Babou stresses his intention to focus more on the domestic and internal dynamics and development of Bamba's ideas and practices, most notably on Islamic education. Like many younger scholars, especially when their first book is a revised

dissertation, Babou proposes to revolutionize the field, and to shed startlingly new insights which will require the rethinking and rewriting of the historiography. As is often the case, the author makes some contributions to the literature, but he promises far more than he can deliver. Despite these qualifications, Babou does make some contributions to the literature and our understanding of the meaning of “jihad,” a word that deserves clarification and refinement in today’s world.

Babou draws well and selectively on the extensive secondary literature in English and French as well as the familiar archival materials that others have investigated rather thoroughly. This work, however, only cites a few of the available archival French sources without revealing any new documents, or offering any new insights into that data. While the author conducted some interviews in Wolof in Senegal, he could have interviewed a much larger pool of informants and integrated their accounts more assertively into the narrative. The interviews were undertaken in a rather confined area of the Murid heartland and in relatively truncated periods of fieldwork. More archival and oral research in Senegal would have considerably enhanced the author’s intention to tap into underused and new materials and to break new ground. The book does make a solid start at exploring the memories of some Murid members, but much more could have been done with this avenue of investigation. Babou could have utilized their actual words in the text to give a more compelling voice to the narrative and to argue his case for Amadou Bamba as an original and astute thinker and practitioner, especially in the area of Muslim education.

The author does a commendable and original job of tracing Bamba’s lineage back several centuries and considering the cleric’s familiar and intellectual predecessors. Previous biographies have given scant attention to Bamba’s ancestors and have often skimmed over his early years, particularly Bamba’s Islamic education. Babou makes a convincing case for analyzing the formative influences of Amadou Bamba’s life and thinking and how the Muridiyya emerged and built upon a long and revered tradition and did not spring out of nowhere. Another strength involves the careful narrative of Bamba’s various moves throughout western Senegal and the individuals, including religious figures and traditional Wolof leaders, with whom he interacted on a daily basis. These encounters foreshadow the manner in which Bamba would interface with the French colonial authorities, a topic that has engaged numerous scholars and followers. Babou correctly asserts that the inconsistent and reactionary reaction of the French to Amadou Bamba arose from colonial reliance on traditional Wolof chiefs unalterably opposed to the cleric out of fear for their own authority. The author also rightly insists that the outdated and discredited notion of collaborator vs. resistor does not adequately describe the dynamic, ambiguous, and at times apparently conflicting relationship, on both sides, between the Murid founder and the colonial authorities. Yet, whereas the author succinctly reviews the recent literature, he fails to provide any new insights or nuances based on his own research and fieldwork. Likewise, throughout the

book, Babou competently summarizes and synthesizes the secondary literature while lacking a certain degree of originality or creativity.

The book, although disappointing in regards to providing a fresh analysis of Amadu Bamba's relationships with the colonial authorities and insufficient insights into his thinking and the practice of Islamic education, should appeal to scholars interested in the Murid brotherhood and recent Senegalese religious and political history and society. It might serve as a useful case study for use in advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in the history of Islam in Africa.

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Marissa J. Moorman. *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola from 1945 to Recent Times*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Intonations takes the reader deep into the heart of the urban shantytowns (*musseques*) of Luanda to reconstruct the forging of the Angolan nation in this unique crucible. Through the prism of popular music, Moorman examines the intertwined processes of nation and nationalism across the colonial–post-colonial divide in order to contest the dominant narrative of Angolan independence that privileges the activities of guerrilla movements and political exiles in neighboring states. By shifting the angle back into the colony-cum-country and focusing on domestic events and developments and, in particular, the culture of popular music in Luanda's *musseques*, Moorman compellingly argues that musical instruments, intimate dances and infectious rhythms were every bit as important to the process of nation as were the weapons of war, guerilla maneuvers and political slogans that heretofore have dominated the history and historiography of Angolan independence.

The vivid reconstructions of Luanda's *musseques* and the ways that Moorman brings these spaces and their denizens alive are arguably *Intonations'* greatest contributions. Often conceived of in both historical and contemporary imaginations as a teeming, sprawling, unruly space with blurry – if even distinguishable – geographical or social borders, Moorman draws upon colonial social science research and a collection of rich oral testimony to help the reader make sense of this seemingly impenetrable area. Not only does she unpack the physical space, rendering the *musseques* into series of interconnected, yet saliently distinct neighborhoods, but Moorman also reconstructs the web of social relations both across and within these (sub-)spaces and the ways these changed over time. In the process, the book illuminates class and gender divisions, but

also the ways that residents disregarded them, especially as the music began to thump and the dancing correspondingly intensified.

Moorman's examination of popular music also helps draw attention to the somewhat inadvertent, yet irrefutably important, ways in which it contributed to the development of nationalism in colonial Angola and, by contrast, the heavy-handed manner in which the post-independent Angolan government employed it. While scholars elsewhere have identified music (namely, songs) as a form of resistance that typically expressed anti-colonial sentiments, Moorman's understandings of the roles of popular music in Angolan history are both more subtle and complex. Through her examination of the social relations related to the production and consumption of music, *Intonations* demonstrates how men and women forged a sense of national identity, or "Angolanness," in the late colonial era. As both musicians and their audiences began to imagine an Angola on their own terms during this "golden age of music," they were engaged in a psychological and expressive process of "cultural sovereignty" that was also inescapably political. Thus, rather than portraying the production and consumption of popular music as feeding or reflecting a narrowly defined political nationalism, Moorman explores a cultural process that helped unite people in an imagined, and ultimately independent, nation. It would be difficult to imagine a more political act.

For all of its myriad contributions, *Intonations* does require some extrapolative leaps of faith, both within the musseques and, perhaps more problematically, emanating outwards from the capital to the rest of Angola. In both cases it is difficult to assess how broadly popular music culture penetrated individuals' consciousness and imagination. Within the musseques, the popular music process undeniably shaped the sentiments of the reasonably small numbers of young club-goers and musicians—the vast majority of Moorman's informants—but it is not clear exactly how demographically transcendent this phenomenon was. Elderly, or even middle-aged, musseque residents are largely absent from the text, while women also remain largely silenced, figuring mainly as anonymous audience members and musicians' girlfriends. Yet, because the book's central argument operates at the collective level, greater access and insight into these constitutive sub-populations is arguably essential. Further, even if these groups did participate in "the forging of the nation," surely they did not experience it in a uniform way? If so, this would suggest a singular (reductive) process of "Angolanness." Instead, we must assume that generational, gender and class factors shaped the way people imagined and forged the nation—even if Moorman does a superb job in explaining how music eroded many of these divisions.

The book's cogency also wanes due to a thinning of the evidence as Moorman exports the process of nation beyond the capital city to the far-flung regions of the country. Indeed, despite her assessment of how radio might have facilitated the reterritorialization of this cultural process from Luanda's shantytowns to the Angolan

countryside, virtually all of the constitutive elements that made the shantytowns such a unique space are lacking in the latter setting. While some residents of rural areas or smaller cities certainly listened in, the cosmopolitanism and “cultural sovereignty” that marked the *musseques* and which are so central to the book’s argument were absent in these settings, or are at least unexplored. Without a vibrant club scene, competing bands, ethnic and class mixing, etc. it is difficult to envisage rural residents imagining the nation in an identical manner to shantytown residents. In a sense, Moorman is a victim of her own cogency: her argument related to the uniqueness of the *musseques* in the forging of the nation is so persuasive that simply extrapolating this phenomenon to the rest of Angola is problematic. Interviews with residents from these settings would potentially have made this less of a leap of faith and more of a confident stride.

Although upper-level undergraduate students may be able to grasp much of this much-welcomed contribution to the regrettably small body of Angolan historiography, *Intonations* is probably best-suited for a graduate-level course. Readers who have not previously explored the relationship between culture and politics may find these recurring passages somewhat inaccessible. Further, Moorman is at her best when she is engaging and problematizing existing historiography and the dominant nationalist narrative. While scholars and graduate students will likely appreciate these pursuits, undergraduate students may find them distracting. For similar reasons, the book’s complexity and scholarly tone are unlikely to appeal to a general audience, though Moorman’s prose is a delight and at times even exhibits a playful approach, as she implores readers to figuratively escape with her into the labyrinthine *musseques*.

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Kristin Loftsdottir. *The Bush is Sweet: Identity, Power and Development among WoDaabe Fulani in Niger*. Uppsala: Nordiska Africainstitutet, 2008.

The WoDaabe of Niger are relatively understudied, but due to the region's recent international export of crafts, metalwork, clothing, and traditional music, anthropological and ethnological studies these people are growing in popularity. Based on having lived among her “subject's of study” for several months from August 1996 to June 1998, Iceland's Kristin Loftsdottir’s ethnographic research provides an introspective analysis of rural and urban WoDaabe.

Loftsdottir covers historical connections between the WoDaabe and their land through exploring issues of land use, urban development, pastoralism, and adaptations to such severe meteorological events as floods and droughts. In addition, Loftsdottir

explains how western depictions of WoDaabe are mostly incorrect, since WoDaabe culture is more intricate and complicated than the simplistic and exotic images of global “otherness” conveyed through folkloric or tourist-catered dances.

The Bush is Sweet builds upon Loftsdottir's personal observations and contact with WoDaabe, as well as many years studying globalization, race, gender, indigenous people, pastoralism, and ethnicity as a professor at the Department of Social and Human Sciences, University of Iceland. The dilemma for ethnographic research stems from several shortcomings, including phenomenology of perception from the point of the researcher and inability to construct an analytical conclusion without the subjects significantly changing their behavior. Loftsdottir's poignant analysis and critical observational eye, however, provides a candid and introspective journey of the WoDaabe culture. One of the book's primary purposes is to investigate the role of and lessen the effect of globally cut-off groups of indigenous peoples and illustrate how they play a larger part in the affairs of the greater local and regional communities.

Loftsdottir's observations of the WoDaabe's close relationship with their natural surroundings illustrate a way of life inherently tied to the “bush.” Of particular concern, Loftsdottir discusses the effects of wind, sand, drought, and rain on agriculture and livestock. Ultimately, the pastoralist nature of the WoDaabe allows for survival through adaptability to varying conditions. The younger generation of WoDaabe, however, feels torn between working in the city and leaving their elders or working in the bush tending animals and crops, while letting the globalization of industry and technology pass them by. It is in this latter disjuncture that Loftsdottir pays particularly close attention, and she succeeds.

In interviews with two WoDaabe friends, Loftsdottir finds a contrast between city and rural living as binary oppositions. For instance, “[T]he bush is sweet as sugar, while Niamey [the capital of Niger] is the place of corruption; the bush is a place of freedom for individuals while in Niamey they are constantly observed; in the bush people eat food that makes them strong and healthy, while in Niamey they eat food that lacks power and its unhealthy; in the bush people are surrounded by family while in Niamey they are without their closest kin...life is better in the bush” (p. 139).

In order to sum up Loftsdottir's experiences living in the bush, a WoDaabe friend's observation offers a few, comforting words of acclamation, “...something you [Loftsdottir] never knew before, you know hunger, you know thirst, you know hot, you know cold...you know how it is to not being able to bathe properly, how to sit down by yourself all alone...I think that now you know the bush” (p. 92).

All in all, Loftsdottir offers an in-depth observational critique of Niger's WoDaabe in both their rural and urban settings. *The Bush is Sweet* is actually an extension of Loftsdottir's dissertation, and thus, incorporates a plethora of reputable references covering all aspects of WoDaabe culture. Parts of the book take on a diary-like narrative, which at times, seems a little overdone. Of course, Loftsdottir's astute

observations and verbal clarity are essential elements that showcase a deep knowledge of WoDaabe living. Nonetheless, this ethnographic work should be applauded for its authenticity and a personal commitment to the field of anthropology at large. Likewise, this would be an ideal text for undergraduate and graduate students interested in West African studies, anthropology, WoDaabe culture, pastoralism, and Saharan studies.

Matthew J. Forss
Independent Scholar

Benjamin Lawrence. *Locality, Mobility, and "Nation": Periurban Colonialism in Togo's Eweland 1900-1960*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007.

Locality, Mobility, and "Nation" contains an introduction and six chapters, with each chapter representing a story the author identified while undertaking archival research in Togo, Benin, Ghana, France and Switzerland from early 1999 through mid-2005, and for which he then sought oral information from witnesses to substantiate and develop. Chapter one examines the emergence of the periurban realm, the rural zone within the orbit of a major urban center or market town. The remaining chapters are case studies of local conflict, often representative of broader mobilizations from the 1920s to Togo's independence from France in 1960, but with a focus on the interwar years. Chapter two examines a dispute over a town's leadership and chieftancy. Chapter three explores a 1933 revolt by market women in Togo's capital, Lomé. The use of vodou by men and women as a means to reclaim political authority is the subject of chapter four. The activities of the German Togo-Bund, a protonationalist group, are detailed in chapter five. Chapter six offers a synthesis of the previous chapters and delves into local perceptions of the development of print journalism in Togo since the 1930s and is followed by a brief epilogue.

Lawrence conducted over 150 oral interviews to gain a greater understanding of Togolese nationalism. The author argues that studies of colonialism and nationalism have focused too much on the activities of the state, chiefs, urban dwellers, males, and the elite while undervaluing the importance of farmers, market women, and other rural-dwelling populations, especially those in the periurban realm. Lawrence succeeds in highlighting how ordinary people, including women, who lived outside of Lomé engaged with colonial officials, mobilized against unwelcome colonial initiatives including the deposing of certain chiefs and changes in taxation, and, when necessary, made use of a rather porous border with the Gold Coast's (present day Ghana's) Ewelands.

Lawrence demonstrates rural people's perceptions of French rule and the continuity of the nationalist struggle from the pre- to post-WWII period. By examining the social and political history of the decades which led up to Togo's independence, Lawrence uses his focus on the periurban to describe a more nuanced evolution of the nationalist struggle. In doing so, he arrives at a less glorified picture of the rule of Togo's Ewe nationalist leader and first president Sylvanus Olympio. Lawrence believes that the assassinated Olympio was less visionary and more opportunistic than generally portrayed, in part because he is so often contrasted with his successor, Togo's, and Africa's, longest-ruling dictator, Gnassingbé Eyadéma.

Whereas the author's concern about studies which present an artificial urban-rural dichotomy is well-founded and his efforts to enhance understanding of those living in communities not entirely urban or rural well executed, he perhaps overstates the extent to which his study, by focusing on the periurban, represents something entirely new or serves as a model for the study of colonial Africa. The author does not consistently and meaningfully meet his stated objective of "incorporating spatial theory into the social history of the anticolonial struggle" (p. 9) or his goal of "mapping the extent of involvement of the many constituencies in Eweland in the nationalist enterprise" (p. 180).

Nonetheless, *Locality, Mobility, and "Nation"* constitutes a considerable contribution to the history of the Ewe people and understanding French West Africa under colonialism. It represents the first detailed history of French rule of Togoland available in English. Lawrence's well-researched and documented study includes excellent maps, historical photos which are crisp and clear, important original interview material, and over 100 pages of extensive notes, bibliography and index. *Locality, Mobility, and "Nation"* will appeal to graduate students and experts with interest in the Ewe and Togo, as well as those with interests in African history and nationalist movements more generally.

Heidi G. Frontani
Elon University

**David Graeber. *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar*.
Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007.**

Anthropologist David Graeber seeks in this ethnography of politics, history, and culture to uncover the roots and political significance of an old conflict that divides the social, economic, ritual and political life in Befato, a small town of between 300 and 500 people in Madagascar. At the time of his arrival in Befato in 1990, many of its

inhabitants were not on speaking terms with each other. Social life and local politics were structured along cleavages produced by old ancestral rivalries and family histories which impelled descendants to act with a “hidden source of bitterness and resentment” (p. 367). This conflict stands central to the *problematique* Graeber wants to address in this ethnography: how is it that Befato became divided between two sections, each considering themselves to be the descendants of two quarreling ancestors? What is the significance of the fact that one of these two ancestors was a noble (*andriana*) whose descendants today are impoverished farmers, while the other was a former slave (*mainty*) whose descendants are relatively well off? And how is it that Befato people believe that the mixing of these two ancestors’ bodies or their contemporary descendants can only lead to catastrophe? What exactly transpired in 1987 at a communal ordeal that was supposed to have re-established community solidarity but is now remembered by Befato people as proof that such solidarity is in fact not possible?

In answering these questions, Graeber leads us in an engaging manner through a succession of rich narratives obtained through taped interviews, superbly analysed ethnographic encounters, and sharp arguments based on a thorough knowledge of the ethnographical record and historical archives, including state records. Graeber is interested in political action and what could be constituted as ‘the political’ and ‘politics.’ Given the lack of something resembling a formal political sphere in Malagasy life, a fact remarked upon and theorized by earlier anthropologists, Graeber develops a range of arguments concerning political action based on his exploration of the political aspects of conversations and narratives and what he calls ‘relations of command’ – all in the quest of understanding the cleavages and conflicts in contemporary Befato.

Unsurprisingly, the cleavage between former nobles and former slaves turns out to be of central importance. Graeber argues that Malagasy have come to see all power relations or “relations of command” as “refractions of slavery” (p. 43). Graeber uses this starting point to investigate “relations of command” and power and authority in the context of the history of the state, local bureaucrats and social class, attitudes toward schooling, the practice of spirit mediums, types of political personae and the violence implicated in the memories of the ancestors. While he concurs with the ethnographic record positing the nonexistence of formal political spheres in Malagasy culture, he finds politics everywhere, expressed particularly in the context of narratives. For example, ancestral power is manifested to living people through “little narratives of transgression and retribution” (p. 60). Narratives not only direct him to the relationship between political action and magical action but also to the ways in which stories are ways of establishing authority through knowledge. In addition to his insightful definition of politics, his Befato material leads him to discuss two other important concepts, that of “negative authority” and “anti-heroic history.”

In trying to present an ethnography that is both honest and not written and structured exclusively for “the market.” Graeber does well to treat the ordinary (and extraordinary) people of Befato as “historical characters” (p. 31) and as historians in their own right. In this respect, his acknowledgment of the influence of character development in Russian novels is illuminating, and the list of names and descriptions of the characters who feature in his book, which is included at the end, is pretty useful. Graeber is not only interested in politics, but also the politics of research and writing. His reflections on this topic, especially those expressed in the epilogue, are of immense insight, originality and lacking in obfuscation. Other methodological comments—such as how, through his style of his research he became a “medium for spreading” stories (p. 309) and how Befato people “argued through him” by reporting narratives back and forth (P. 310)—adds to the multidimensional value of this ethnography. Not only is the result an ethnography that embodies the sentiment of fieldwork as a “dialogic process,” but its approach to politics reads, if not in the tradition of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s ‘magical realism,’ like an account of the political realism of magic. This is a must-read for historians and anthropologists of Madagascar while those interested in the anthropology of politics and power should read this ethnographic account together with Graeber’s collection of more ‘theoretical’ essays titled *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion and Desire* (AK Press, 2007).

Detlev Krige
Rhodes University

**James Currey. *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature*.
Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008.**

James Currey, the editorial director at Heinemann Educational Books from 1967 to 1984, has produced a book that for many will be difficult to avoid reading straight through. It is many things at once: a personal career retrospective; an insider’s view of the often frustratingly complex business of book publishing; a fascinating series of glimpses into the personalities and struggles of numerous prominent—and not so prominent—African authors; and a foundational history of arguably one of the most important literary series in the history of books. His depth of relationships within the African publishing world is immediately evident in the volume’s simultaneous release by not only Ohio and his own imprint, but also by East African Educational Publishers (Nairobi), Mkuki na Nyota (Dar es Salaam), Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria (Ibadan), Weaver Press (Harare), and Wits University Press (Johannesburg). This is

hardly surprising as during his tenure the series released over 250 titles by authors from more than twenty-five African countries. Based upon personal recollections, extracts from the original African Writer Series (AWS) correspondence files (now held at University of Reading), various works of scholarly criticism, and media reviews, Currey produces a sprawling account that remains equally readable in sequence or alternatively, when simply opened to nearly any page. Complemented by selections from the distinctive AWS cover photography and author portraits of George Hallet, *Africa Writes Back* is likely to become a necessary purchase for anyone with more than a cursory interest in African literatures.

With a huge cast of characters that includes editors, reviewers, literary scholars, agents, publishers, politicians, and of course the authors themselves, Currey rather sensibly divides this history by geographic region. Beginning with West Africa and the founding of the series with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Currey intersperses his history and brief author portraits with a number of in-depth profiles under the rubric "Publishing..." These include Achebe as well as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nuruddin Farah, Alex la Guma, Dennis Brutus, Bessie Head, Mazisi Kunene, and Dambudzo Marechera. A common theme amongst many of the authors covered here is the oft contentious relationship between publisher and author on issues ranging from advance/royalty payments to editorial recommendations, the most problematic of which, by Currey's own admission, emerged with Ayi Kwei Armah. For his part, Armah later commented, in characteristic uncompromising terms, of his hopes "to find an African publisher as opposed to a neo-colonial writers' coffle owned by Europeans but slyly misnamed 'African'" (p. 75). One suspects, as Currey alludes, that he was likely not the only author with such sentiments even if these were rarely expressed openly. Indeed, such relationships were hardly limited to writers from Africa, and this in part exemplifies why some had difficulties even accepting the label of 'African writer.' Wole Soyinka for a time resisted having his novel *The Interpreters* appear in AWS for fear of being confined to the "orange ghetto" defined by the recognizable color scheme of AWS volumes.

So Currey, and his self-proclaimed "conspirators" in the promotion of African literatures though the AWS, all too frequently found themselves negotiating a delicate path between artistic vision (and sometimes very real material need) of authors and their own position in an evolving corporate structure where the bottom-line was the bottom-line. That the AWS succeeded at all in this environment was in part due to the revenues produced by Heinemann's wider educational book sales in Africa that allowed the publication of works with rather low expected initial sales. Certain authors' popularity also contributed to the possible publication of other new works, as evidenced by founding editor Chinua Achebe's titles accounting for one-third of the total AWS series sales in 1984 (at that time approximately 250 titles). Still, the intricacies

of this balancing act often initially escaped the writers themselves, leading South African Poet Laureate Mazisi Kunene to attack “the commercialism that guides the selection of what must be published from Africa” (p. 240). He later apologized, but it is clear that Currey and his staff had to invest enormous efforts in seeing through to print works that many others in the industry viewed as commercially unviable.

We are indeed fortunate that they did so. The broad availability of so many AWS titles on the continent from the 60s through the 80s (before corporate changes put large numbers out of print) likely did give many “a young person the idea that Africans could write and get published,” thus contributing to the future expansion of African literature (p. 246). The impact of the series in Europe and North America on developing scholars of African Studies – many in disciplines far afield from literature – should also not be underestimated. In his concluding chapter, Currey asks whether there is a future for the AWS. The unfortunate answer seems to be that new corporate ownership strategies have limited the series to annual reprints of well-established authors, producing dogged searches for the “orange ghetto” in used bookshops around the globe. No new titles have been added to AWS since 2003.

Readers may notice unevenness in the coverage of writers featured, but this could be the result of a similar trend in the archival files that are the basis of this history. For instance, of the eight writers in the expanded “Publishing...” profiles, five are from southern Africa. Or perhaps these were decisions based upon the qualities of their correspondence and the various issues that emerge therein. There are also a few too many typographical errors for a volume of this quality, particularly when proof corrections no longer require costly manual resetting as they did for those AWS authors who found their late changes charged against their advance amounts. None of these minor criticisms detract from the overall impact and usefulness of this volume. It will be of particular value in preparing courses on African literature, especially when paired with Margaret Jean Hay’s edited volume *Using African Novels in the Classroom* (Lynne Rienner, 2000) as many authors covered there also receive treatment from Currey. Some may find the minute intricacies of the publishing industry detailed by Currey a distraction from the more fascinating aspects of the authors’ personalities and their writing process. Yet it is often precisely through these accounts that we learn about writers’ commitment and determination. As Cyprian Ekwensi wrote to Currey in 1976, “writing is the one profession in which you are an apprentice all your life. There is no retirement. You just have to go on struggling in the queue until you die!” (p. 46).

Todd H. Leedy
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S. M. Shamsul Alam. *Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Great Britain colonized Kenya in 1895 following up on the protocol set forth in the 1884 Berlin Conference for regulating European colonization and trade in Africa. After the Second World War, the colonized world was overwhelmed by indigenous nationalist movements sprouting up and demanding for self-determination. In Kenya, it was the Mau Mau revolt that determined the outcome of the demand for national autonomy and the achievement, in 1963, of independence. This book is a study that revolt and its contribution to independent Kenya. To understand Mau Mau one must understand its objectives within the context of the British colonial domination. Furthermore, to properly analyze the actions of the British colonial system one must engage with the popular counter hegemonic actions of resistance movements such as Mau Mau. The author makes a critical clarification that the Mau Mau was not a Kenyatta nationalist project. He identifies it as a movement that was not only violent but also having its own unique cultural, ideological, and political ideas for a free Kenya. The author utilized interviews with knowledgeable persons; primary documents from the Kenya National Archives; secondary literature by Ngugi wa Thiongo, Foucault, Fanon, Chartejee, and others in writing this book.

In discussing post-colonial Kenya, Alam stipulates that there is a deliberate action by the ruling elite to bury Mau Mau history. This, he explains, is because its history is subversive and can serve as a critique of current political realities. He observes that though the subject is of great interest to common Kenyans, it is a history that causes discomfort and embarrassment to the post-colonial ruling elite. This attitude has been clear in the government's failure to honor the freedom fighters. The author provides a good exposé of one of the prominent Mau Mau fighters, Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi. This discussion is critical to understanding some of the personalities that fought for freedom at the expense of their own lives. During the Moi era there were numerous petitions by the family and other individuals that the state honor Dedan Kimathi with a proper burial. The effort, however, was opposed and never honored by the government of the day. These actions and attitudes are reflective of the hesitation of the Kenyan ruling elite to identify with history.

The book makes a unique contribution to understanding the role of the women in the freedom movement. It is a part of the Kenyan history that is seldom taught or discussed, but the contributions of women like Mary Wanjiru and Mekatilili wa Menza serve to correct long-held myths that women were passive in fighting for freedom. The book gives the reader a depiction of women who were active networkers and well engaged in the military offensive against British colonial rule. Another unique contribution is how the book addresses the contribution of literature to understanding history. The earlier writings on Mau Mau spoke of it as a savage Kikuyu entity that was

resisting civilization. This discourse is what then led to the counter discourse that sought to properly explain the movement and its objectives. For example, Ngugi wa Thiongo has written about Mau Mau as a subversive technique for critiquing the post-colonial ruling class, making it clear that the current state is not what the freedom fighters had envisioned when they had sacrificed their lives.

This study points to the crisis of history, and the fact that without a complete understanding of history it becomes almost impossible for independent states to properly develop. Alame links the current crisis in governance to how colonialism was fought for and how the nation state was formed. The Mau Mau contribution to independent Kenya has been a shunned topic and has often been judged on the basis of ethnicity, yet it is only in understanding the role of such movements and their objectives that this history can serve as a standard by which the current political leadership can be criticized and brought to order.

What is unique about the book is its richness of information about the Mau Mau movement. As an outsider of Bangladeshi decent the author's comparative view of Kenya and Bangladesh provides an advantage for understanding how the British went about consolidating power and colonizing their constituents. Particularly useful is his analysis of how understanding the Mau Mau history makes it possible to critique today's political system. I only wish the author had discussed this even further to draw a line as to the importance of history in determining good governance.

As a Kenyan it is interesting how much I have learned about my own history from reading this book. It should constitute critical reading for social sciences departments and African politics and history units in Kenyan universities. It makes a useful contribution not only to understanding the crafting and structure of an anti-colonial political movement but also to understanding the objectives of such movements and using these objectives as a subversion to today's political crisis.

In conclusion the author effectively communicated the importance of understanding Mau Mau as a critical component of Kenya's history. The ease in which he uses a wide array of illustrations from Kenya's past makes it easier for the reader to understand some of his fundamental assertions. His discussion on the gap that exists in the knowledge of Kenya's colonial history and the reasons for this makes the work an objective piece for understanding the leading Kenyan aristocrats. Overall the text's content enables the reader to understand the Mau Mau not as an ethnic entity but as a nationalist movement of men and women who sacrificed so as to ensure the freedom of Kenya.

Grace Maina
University of Bedford

Richard Price. *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

This is a different history of the British empire. It is a profound exploration of the dynamics of the encounter between the Xhosa peoples and the British. Its setting is the eastern Cape frontier of South Africa in the first half of the nineteenth century. Outside Britain, Richard Price discovered a mine of unused colonial archives, uncommon imperial subjects and a conventionally untold story of the empire. He, therefore, concocted an interesting brew of British culture at the frontier of empire. *Making Empire* investigates the way colonial encounters produced a culture of imperial rule.

On the basis of disorganized, eccentrically classified but remarkably useful colonial archives which include reports of British colonial officials, records of imperial administration, and missionary archives, the author wrote a vivid and well-documented history of the aims, practices, values, mindsets and ideologies of imperial agents like governors, military officers, missionaries and even intruders. These sources disclosed what the imperial agents were doing as they interacted with Xhosa culture. Similarly, they revealed what the former thought about what they were doing at the imperial frontier.

Why the Xhosa peoples, not the reputed Zulus? This is not a puzzle; the Zulus did not resist British rule for nearly a century, the Xhosa did. The predominance of the Zulus in the British imagination is indeed a British construct. The reality, a problematic one, is that in the eastern Cape relentless British expansion met with deep resistance of the Xhosa peoples. What is surprising, however, is how the British neglected the history of the first African people whom they had to decide how to rule.

This history of the empire breaks good ground insofar as it gives a voice to both the imperial ruler and the imperial subject. The colonial encounter, by its nature, was a space of inter-relationships and hybridity, where the behaviour of the coloniser depended on and was conditioned by that of the colonised and vice versa. The colonial project was a hegemonic enterprise but a fragile one, since hegemony had to be negotiated and defended to be maintained. In a sense, the empire was real in the metropole, not at the frontier where it was not secure. At the origin of this fragility and insecurity were the imperial subjects, the Xhosa peoples, who remained deeply attached to their culture and resisted any accommodation to the British terms of cultural framework.

This dark aspect of the empire figures little in the imperial historiography. Richard Price offers us detailed and sad accounts of how British imperial agents met the Xhosa and failed in imposing an imperial culture, a civilised, liberal and progressive culture, the imperial authorities claimed. It has to be noted that the Xhosa interacted with the British at many levels and developed a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, cooperation and contention with them since their advent in the late eighteenth century.

The first part of the book is an extensive study of what happened to missionary culture as it met the Xhosa. Shrewsbury, Cumming, Niven, Williams, Barker, and others were the missionaries who came to the frontier with a deep sense of optimism. They came straight out of the culture of eighteenth-century evangelicalism, which placed at the center of its religious and social thought the power of individual salvation and the doctrinal certainty that God was in control of the world. For most of these uneducated, highly spiritual and zealous evangelical missionaries, there was every reason to expect Xhosa conversion to proceed easily and rapidly. For these strongly engaged field missionaries civilization was subsidiary to conversion. They resided with the Xhosa peoples, lived their lives, interacted with them, experienced the true and tough frontier, yet failed in their mission. The Xhosa people proved intellectually and culturally impermeable to missionary attempts of conversion. The cultural encounter with the Xhosa peoples was partial, short-lived and, therefore, destabilized missionary culture to the extent that these culturally relativist missionaries soon turned essentially racist. Their objective, optimistic, and open discourse shifted into a radically subjective, pessimistic and closed one. A different understanding and a new encounter with the Xhosa were called for.

The imperial state interaction with the Xhosa is what the second part of the book is about. The religious mission was imploded and this motivated the state's intervention. The cultural interaction of the missionaries gave place to a settler culture and to the state's indirect rule. Missionaries closed their minds to the Xhosa and adopted a new discourse and a different strategy to meet them. The Xhosa peoples were now perceived as a degenerate race unable to survive and destined for extinction. They could not embrace the benefits that the British culture offered them. By the 1830s, a new knowledge system about the Xhosa was established. It perceived them as cunning, deceitful, and inveterate thieves and irredeemably savage; their chiefs, who were the major link with the imperial administration, were seen as conspiring manipulators and agents of tyranny. Great Xhosa chiefs, such as Maqoma, Ngqika, Mhala, and Xhoxho, for long reputed for their wisdom, intellect and political vocation, came to be seen as obstacles to the spread of British civilization and progress.

Imperial Britain's new knowledge system retreated into ignorance. The Xhosa peoples, who refused to cease to be Xhosa, became the enemies of the empire and joined the characters of the imperial literature of stereotypes. No options were left but coercion, force, humiliation and violence against the Xhosa. This book ends with a sad note, that of the brutalities and atrocities that marked the history of the British relations with the Xhosa.

This sensitive study of the brutal conquest of Africa by the British is useful for the student of history, anthropology, and cultural studies as well as for those who still have nostalgia for the empire.

Adel Manai

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Jeremy Rich. *A Workman is Worthy of His Meat: Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.

Contributing to the burgeoning scholarship about the history of food and its historical influences, *A Workman is Worthy of His Meat* offers a crucial sharpening of historical perspectives on the ways in which French colonialism, and its lasting effects, have shaped food supply and consumption in the Gabon Estuary. Pointing out that scholars of African history have typically focused on food supply and consumption only in times of crisis, Jeremy Rich attempts to redress this imbalance by analyzing the everyday diets of urban (specifically Libreville) and rural residents of the Gabon Estuary from 1840 to 1960. Rich argues that analyzing the daily culinary habits of Libreville residents offers an insight on the colonial urban and rural transformation and experience in Gabon.

Rich unpacks his main arguments in seven chapters that are presented thematically and chronologically. What links the chapters together is the author's overarching assertion that French colonialism disturbed the culinary and agricultural habits of the Gabonese, thereby forcing urban areas like Libreville to find other pathways to the accumulation of food. For example, Rich outlines several reasons for the lasting food shortages in Libreville. One explanation was the heavy reliance of domestic slavery. The author underlines that because Gabon was on the Atlantic coast, the slave trade slowly began infiltrating the Estuary in the mid-eighteenth century, particularly in Mpongwe coastal communities. As a result, rooted domestic slavery greatly impacted the diets of Mpongwe, for it was slaves who cultivated the land and prepared the meals. However, there were also culinary shifts under French occupation and colonialism beginning in 1840. The French disdained slavery and pushed for its elimination. As domestic slavery declined, Libreville residents, who did not want to farm themselves, began to rely heavily on imported food from Europe and other areas of Africa. In pointing out this historical trend, Rich is careful to note that African eating practices never disappeared. The author reminds readers that African and European culinary habits intersected and borrowed from one another. Hence, the culinary (and cultural) habits of the Gabon Estuary became a hybrid of European and African influences.

This is clearly an erudite and scholarly book rooted in the extensive use of a wide array of sources—clearly a noteworthy strength of the book. The author utilizes diverse sources, such as interviews and records from Gabon and France. This helps the author

to provide a useful synthesis of issues of colonialism, food supply and production, and changing access to food.

A key strength of Rich's book is embedded in the useful background information he provides for the Gabon Estuary. The author discusses the country's colonial past, its ties to slavery, its environment, and even the ethnic groupings of the people. For example, he explains who the Mpongwe people are (a small ethnic community that was highly influential in the Gabon Estuary until French occupation in 1840). Equipped with the beginning knowledge of the historical context in which Rich frames the book's main themes and arguments, readers will be better able to approach and understand how culinary habits and access to food changed in colonial Gabon.

Rich's work also positively diverges from many African historical texts in that he carefully weaves in the roles that women (both African and European) played in transforming Gabonese culinary habits. Though the author points out in his introduction that "constructions of gender are not on the table," he impressively intertwines the historical narratives of women as part of his larger arguments and explorations (p. xvii). For instance, in the 1920s, many Mpongwe women in Libreville protested colonial policies on food production by demanding that restrictions and fines on food be lifted. In highlighting such events, the author acknowledges the important roles that African women have played in shaping the political, social, and economic facets of their societies. Though not a book specifically focused on gender roles, this text is an excellent example of how historical narratives of African women can be utilized to better shape the understanding of historical events.

A drawback of the text is that there is some confusion over exactly how European and African eating habits started to diverge in the twentieth century. The author claims throughout that African and European culinary practices always intersected and that even today the country's colonial legacy shapes contemporary culinary practices. He points out, however, that from the early twentieth century Europeans started to distance themselves from African culinary habits. He stresses that multiple factors such as strict racial lines in Libreville and changing attitudes toward race and hygiene influenced this change. Unfortunately, the author leaves several significant questions unanswered such as, did Africans, like Europeans, also try to distance themselves from European foods? How complete was the divergence of European and African eating habits? It is hard to believe that European food in Gabon today is not somehow influenced by African culinary practices.

This is an excellent book despite its shortcomings. *A Workman is Worthy of His Meat* contributes significantly to the understanding of multiple forms of history—colonial, economic, political, food, and cultural history. Scholars and graduate students in these fields will greatly benefit from the text. As graduate reading seminar, students will gain from the book's insights such as the linkage between colonialism and changing culinary habits. The text will also provide students with a foundation for discussion and critical

analysis of the historical impacts of colonialism and the agency and roles that the colonized assert in their lives.

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Jay Straker. *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

Focusing on the cultural and moral development of Guinean youth during the period 1958-1984, this book provides a penetrating exposé of an understudied population during a turbulent time in Guinean history. According to Guinea's first president, Sékou Touré, it was the youth who would fight imperialism, promote cultural authenticity, and establish national unity. As the first generation of citizens fully formed during the First Republic, the youth would spearhead the development of the revolutionary nation-state. Straker's book is the first major examination of this important topic.

Departing from previous works about the First Republic, which tend to be either intensely critical or overly laudatory of the Touré regime, Straker's work is characterized by nuance, complexity, and texture. Straker attempts to understand Guinean youth from the inside and from the bottom up. He delves into the experiences of those who came of age during revolution, asking how the revolution shaped their social identities and historical imagination, and how they, in turn, affected the way the revolution played itself out. His primary sources include the writings of Sékou Touré, *Horoya*—the official organ of the party-state—party tracts, newspapers produced by teachers and youth, films, novels, poems, and memoirs written by Guinean intellectuals, photographs, popular plays, and numerous interviews with male and female participants, most notably from the forest region. Basing his claims on information gleaned from these sources, Straker rejects the received wisdom that grants absolute, tyrannical power to Sékou Touré and reduces the Guinean people to one dimensional figures devoid of agency, whose postcolonial history consists only of oppression. Straker argues that Guinea was composed not only of two groups—those with power and those without; rather, it was divided by a multiplicity of conflicting and overlapping categories, including ethnicity, region, religion, generation, gender, and class.

The Guinean revolution was characterized by intense conflict in multiple arenas. Turning tradition on its head, the party-state promoted young people over their elders, granting them a political role unimaginable in earlier times. In their attempts to

transform both town and countryside, the youth challenged local authority structures for the power and authority to define nation and culture. Nor were the youth homogeneous. They were divided into schooled and unschooled, urban and rural—with the unschooled and rural idealized by the state as authentic, untainted by French culture and individualist aspirations. During the First Republic, Western-educated urban youth were compelled to go to the countryside to engage in manual labor and to receive the wisdom of their rural counterparts. It was with this authentic indigenous knowledge that the new youth were to transform the nation.

Rejecting the unspoken assumption that Conakry and the coastal towns represent the nation, Straker asks how the revolution was experienced in the interior—particularly, in the remote forest region. In the process, he demonstrates the state’s ambivalence toward the forest and its peoples. While idealizing the rural populace in general, the state withheld its seal of approval from the forest region, with its unfamiliar rites and rituals that struck fear into the hearts of the predominantly Muslim ruling elite. From 1959 to 1961, it carried out a harsh demystification campaign against the forest entities it could not control, destroying fetishes and other objects central to forest religions and cultures. The campaign was implemented by forest youth and widely resisted by local elders. Gender conflict also ensued, as the state forced male elders to reveal secrets previously off-limits to women.

Other groups also resisted state impositions. Intellectuals in the urban areas protested educational reforms that rejected the French-centered colonial curriculum and threatened their privileged social positions. In 1961 and again in 1965, the state cracked down on teachers and students, whose allegiance to the revolution was in question. The “Socialist Cultural Revolution,” launched in 1968, initiated major reforms that were intended to transform the national culture and economy. Reluctant to rely on schools to complete the task, the state turned to militant theater, dance, and music—“authentic” African culture—to accomplish its goals. Local and national theatrical and dance competitions, with mandatory participation, became the preferred locales for capturing youth allegiance and imagination. Forced participation resulted in more conflicts with students who preferred to spend their time in study, with parents who protested their loss of control over their children’s time and labor, and especially with the parents of girls, who feared the widespread sexual harassment and abuse associated with some of the cultural troupes. However, there was also a positive side. The final competitions, held in the Conakry, brought together youth of all ethnicities and regions. Performing “Guinean culture” in the capital, these youth could truly imagine themselves as a nation.

The only weakness in Straker’s book is a function of the complexity of his task. The book is divided into two parts—the first laying the theoretical and historical groundwork for the youth revolution, the second focusing on experiences in the forest region. While the first part is necessary, the second is by far the most compelling. It is

there that the voices of ordinary people make the story their own. A more dynamic opening, incorporating African voices, would give the reader a preview of the richness of the book's second half. These points aside, the book makes an important contribution to the historiography of independent Guinea. It is mandatory reading for graduate students and scholars interested in youth, revolution, and nation-building in Guinea and elsewhere.

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Thomas Benjamin. *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and their Shared History, 1400-1900*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

The growth of Atlantic history has called for the production of textbooks to consolidate and render masses of new research into a coherent story. The new Atlantic history, as opposed to an older tradition which addressed primarily European expansion and its colonial activities in America, pays more attention to the non-European actors—Africans and Native Americans. Benjamin's attempt falls firmly into this latter school, as indeed the work is structured around the meeting and interaction of European, Africans, and Indians.

The book begins with antecedents, a quick sketch of Africa, America, and Europe on the eve of contact that is fairly comprehensive, covering both mighty empires and decentralized polities in all continents. This is followed by sections outlining the mostly political interactions between them. "Conquests" deals with attempts of Europeans to conquer and dominate parts of Africa and the familiar stories of Spanish conquest in the Americas, and including the Portuguese conquest of coastal Brazil, rounded out by a short account of Morocco's conquest of the Songhay Empire in West Africa. "Realms" outlines Spanish society in post Conquest America and similar Portuguese societies in Brazil and western Africa, notably Angola. A section following then brings in the northern Europeans, first by describing Spanish America's international trade and the incursions of French, Dutch, English, and other Europeans into the realm, including the creation of colonies. Here Benjamin is admirably comprehensive, including colonial ventures in the Caribbean and South America and noting the work of the Dutch and other lesser colonial powers.

While Benjamin's first part is unusual in its comprehensiveness, the story that he tells in is more or less an expected one. In the second half, however, he engages much newer themes. "Engagement" describes, again with multi-regional focus the way in which Europeans and indigenous Americans interacted in the New World created by

the political maneuvering of the first section. After dealing with Spanish government in conquered America, Benjamin also brings in the missionary efforts, not only in Mexico and Peru, but also in Paraguay and in Canada. This is then followed by two back to back chapters dealing with the slave trade and the African experience in slavery, again showing a good regional balance between North and South America. An interesting and engaging chapter, "Partners" explores the wide ranging sexual and gender relations between Europeans and various non-Europeans ranging from the casual "wives of the coast" in Africa, through the elite marriages of Spanish conquistadors with Aztec and Inca nobility, to the temporary marriages of French backwoodsmen and their Huron consorts.

"Rivals" moves back to inter-European rivalries of the eighteenth century occasionally involving indigenous people as participants, followed by chapters that cover the Age of Revolution, including the American, Dutch and French Revolutions; then the Haitian Revolution, the liberation of Spanish America, and the independence of Brazil. The final chapter tells the story of the abolition of slavery and the slave trade.

The Atlantic World is a good representation of the themes of the New Atlantic History, which focuses on exactly the sort of questions and interactions that Benjamin chooses. It is particularly commendable for the ease with which both Americas and Africa are included in the Atlantic World. He has been attentive to recent literature and themes, though as this is not a work of primary scholarship, the book adds little in any specific area to that fund. Furthermore, in some areas, notably the African sections, it presents some distressing errors. Benjamin, for example, presents the Portuguese presence in the Gold Coast in far too "colonial" a light, as if there had been a conquest. He also seriously misstates the story of Kongo's engagement with Portugal, relegating its Golden Age from about 1580 to 1665 as a period of isolation and decay. His step is generally surer on the American regions. On the whole, then, the book is likely to be a worthwhile textbook for classes devoted to the New Atlantic History at the undergraduate level.

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Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*. New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.

Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator writes that his book "offers neither sophisticated arguments nor complicated analysis of the different themes of content of Christian faith. It is not even a technical recipe for doing theology." Rather, it "offers an invitation to

drink, savor, and celebrate theology in an African context (p. 10). For him, theology is the practice of “talking sensible about God,” and “faith seeking understanding and hope” (pp. 3,5). This last quote is telling. Saying that faith in God is required to do theology leaves little room for doubters and non-believers. Orobator does not “intend to make the vexing question of God’s existence or nonexistence the starting point of our reflection on God.” He continues by saying: “If you think this assumption does not adequately express your situation in life, read no further. This book is not for you” (p. 15).

It is clear that Orobator writes for only the believer and views theology as a discipline that does not question God’s existence. For him the philosophical arguments for and against God’s existence fall outside of the domain of theology. Whether these questions are properly called theological is an interesting question, but not one I shall dwell on. I bring it up to highlight Orobator’s view of the relationship between theology and philosophy and the limitations of such a view. He thinks that secular reasoning has no place in theology. One limitation of such a view is that it makes it difficult to enter into dialogue with potential converts who approach questions about what they should believe from a view point based on critical reasoning. Is not understanding the nature of God open to those who are not born believing in him?

In an African context, Orobator thinks that there are no such beings. He provides a quote from John Mbiti: “All African people believe in God. They take this belief for granted.” He completely agrees with Mbiti (p. 19). It is hard to know how Orobator and Mbiti want us to understand this claim. It’s surely false if they mean it literally. I get the feeling, though, that this is how Orobator intends us to understand this claim, which is a problem because there are no doubt Africans who have questioned and doubted the existence of God.

I bring some of these things up to point out some ways in which I think this book could have been better. Had it appealed to philosophy at certain points it could have made difficult theological questions less unsettling. Before providing examples, I will note Orobator’s general method and the structure of the book. The book is divided into 11 chapters. The first two chapters serve as an introduction, and the rest discuss issues such as the triune nature of god, creation, grace, the meaning of “church,” the role of Mary in African Christianity, the place of ancestors in African religion, the relationship between faith and culture and inculturation, and African spirituality in general. A short set of questions for reflection and inspirational prayers follow each chapter. The book also takes inspiration from Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, and takes examples from that book as starting points for discussion. Each chapter begins with a quick account of what the Bible and church teachings have to say of the particular matter at hand, then Orobator puts the subject of the chapter in an African context. In the rest of this review, I shall focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the book.

I mentioned earlier that the book could benefit from philosophy. Let me give an example. Orobator wants his readers to get a better understanding of the Trinity, which he says is mysterious. He does not think that abstract reflection can yield much insight into this matter. He is in general skeptical of purely abstract theologizing and says at many points that his method of doing theology depends on lived experiences. That is all well and good. But let us look at some of things he says about the triune nature of God, which he could have been made clearer with more reasoning. He says that the concept of the Trinity is the idea that there are three persons in one God. Of course, we all know that there is God, his son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. But what sense is there to calling all three of these people as Orobator does? Is God a person? Is the Holy Spirit? I would certainly think that they are not. Jesus was a person (at least in part), that's for sure. However, it is a category mistake to think of the Trinity as being a relationship of three persons in one God.

Of course the Trinity is difficult to understand when we articulate it in terms of three people. Orobator turns to African thought to help us solve this puzzle. This is a good method: it looks at previously untapped ways of thinking to solve problems, and it gives those preaching to Africans a way to articulate the Trinity. He uses the idea *Obirin meta*, which conveys the notion of "a woman who combines the strength, character, personality, and beauty of three women" (p. 31). This metaphor is supposed to help because we can understand how one woman could have this sort of strength. So, we should not let the mysteriousness of the Trinity get in the way of our closeness to God. Orobator then goes on to say that "*Obirin meta* symbolizes the abundant and radical open-endedness of God in God's self and in our encounters of God. The veil of mystery is lifted, and we are able to recognize the God who enters into our experiences and meets us where we are" (pp. 32-33).

What, then, is *Obirin meta* intended to symbolize: the triune nature of God or the idea that God is in our experiences? It is hard to see a clear answer here. This is one of the weakness of the book. Orobator wants to use this symbol to do too much. It does not really help us understand the triune nature of God. It may distract us from the mystery by diverting our attention, but it does nothing to remove the mystery. Had he engaged in a bit of philosophy, we could have made the situation a bit less mysterious. First, we should think of the Trinity not as three persons in one person, but as three roles of one entity.¹ This is how Orobator could have used his metaphor: to show us how we can understand one person playing different roles. Just as a man can be father, lawyer and husband, so can an entity be God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We need to think of the Trinity in this way and not as three persons in one God. This is the sort of philosophical reasoning--the avoidance of category mistakes--that would have helped Orobator.²

There are many strengths in Orobator's method, though, and we do get many insights into the nature of Christianity in an African context. Let me focus on an example. His writing on the nature of sin in and out of an African context is interesting.

Orobator notes that in Africa one does not, as they say, sin against God. One's sin is felt by the entire community. Repenting for one's sins also involves the entire community, an idea very much in conflict with the Western view of confession.

There are more insights into the nature of African religion, especially in the last chapter. We learn that religion in an African context is not only a Sunday affair: it permeates every aspect of culture. Experience is more important to African religion than abstract theory. The Protestant idea that we have a one-on-one relationship with God is very different from the African idea that a community has a relationship with God, and each individual has a role to play in that relationship. Despite these interesting observations, however, we do not quite get much theology. Orobator states a few times that in an African context religion is about experience and one's everyday relationships and not about abstract matters. That theology in an African context is concrete and not abstract would be one way to sum up the view. No doubt that concrete, everyday religious experiences are important, and perhaps it is true that God permeates every aspect of life in Africa. But if theology is just that, and not a reflection on these experiences, reflection which is abstract, it is hard to see what sense there is to calling that theology. It sounds more like living to me. I bring this up in order to suggest again that this book could have benefitted from more reasoning of the theological and philosophical sort. Many of the claims are in need of justification that is not found in the book. For example, Orobator says, "Africans know God from birth" (p. 154). This is a fascinating thesis, and one that is far from obviously true, and, therefore, in need of justification. Are Africans the only people who know God from birth? If so, what explains it? All in all, though, the book does achieve its goal of wetting our appetite for a fuller treatment of this interesting topic.

Notes

1. "Entity" is a term which has a broader extension than "person." Every person is an entity, but not every entity is a person. Molecules, tables, clouds, the number 3 and I are all entities, but just I am a person. Surely it makes more sense to say that God is an entity than a person.
2. This term 'category mistake' comes from Gilbert Ryle. A category mistake is a conceptual mistake. For example, if I say that the number 2 is heavy, I make a conceptual mistake. Numbers can't be heavy, nor can they be light; they are abstract and have no weight.

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Ronald Nicolson (ed.). *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*. Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008.

Persons in Community is a collection of essays commissioned by the Unilever Ethics Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal that gets ambitious billing in its introduction. Sadly, it fails to live up to its billing. The book sets out to answer four important ethical questions: “Is there such a thing as a set of African ethics? What constitutes African ethics? Are African Ethics consistent with, or different from, the prevailing set of Western ethics (however confusing and disarrayed Western ethics may seem to be)? Do African ethics have anything valuable to say, not only to an African context, but also in a wider world?” (p. 1).

There are other interesting, related questions which arise in the book: To what extent can the concepts and moral imperatives that constitute African and western ethical systems fit into the same dialogue? Is western ethics at odds with the basic African worldview? These are all very interesting questions in need of answers. The book’s seven essays do not answer them in a completely satisfactory way, however. Some stray too far from the above questions by discussing solutions to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, aspects of the assimilation of capitalism in Africa, the importance of traditional African healing, and whether or not the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did justice to all South Africans. These are all important issues, but the discussions of them take focus away from the above questions. Only one essay (Shutte’s “African Ethics in a Globalising World”) discusses in-depth the parallels between the views of certain contemporary Thomist (hence western) thinkers and African ethics. Furthermore, only one essay (Mkhize’s “*Ubuntu* and Harmony: An African Approach to Ethics”) directly and properly discusses what constitutes African ethics. Perhaps it is best to view this collection as a first attempt to answer the four key questions and not a comprehensive answer.

There, nevertheless, is a picture of African ethics that emerges from this book, one centered on the concept of *ubuntu*, a familiar word to South Africans. It is of Bantu origin, and has translations in other African languages (e.g., ‘maat’ in Egyptian); yet there is no one-word translation in English. Even so, we can talk about this concept in English. More than one author says that *ubuntu* is the idea that a person is a person through other people. This concept captures the communalism in which we typically think African societies are rooted. Perhaps the clearest articulation in the book comes from a quotation of Desmond Tutu:

A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished, when others are tortured and oppressed, or treated as if there were less than who they are (p. 68).

Nhlanhla Mkhize writes: "*Ubuntu*, the process of becoming an ethical human being, is the process by which balance or the 'orderedness of being' (Karenga 2004, 191) is affirmed. This is realized through relationships characterized by interdependence, justice, solidarity of humankind, respect, empathy and caring. From this perspective, then, ethics is not a matter of individual legislation by abstract, solitary thinkers; rather, it is grounded in practical life and human action" (36). This last part of this quotation supposedly shows how a *ubuntu*-centered moral theory is different from traditionally western ethical thinking.

Ubuntu seems to be, in part, a realization of the shared fate of humanity. First, one must understand that others are as valuable as oneself and that one's own fate depends on others. Second, one must act in light of this realization. *Ubuntu*, then, is an ethical attitude and motivation that one acts in light of and because of. It is a concept grounded in empathy. This is surely a concept that is important, perhaps of utmost importance to ethics. The notion of *ubuntu* could use a fuller articulation in this book. It is, after all, difficult to translate in Western languages, according to more than one author in this book.

Understanding *ubuntu* helps us to understand the answers to the four questions. African ethics have the concept of *ubuntu* to contribute to western ethics, which many of the authors see as flawed for its focus on man as a solitary individual. The essays are united by rejecting the flawed perspective of Western ethics: a lack of focus on the interdependence of community and individual, and the necessity of community for the growth of the individual. The answer to what constitutes African ethics and whether there is such a thing as African ethics could be more developed, but what we see is that there is an African ethics, and it is constituted by the notion of *ubuntu*. As I said, a comprehensive articulation of the concept of *ubuntu* would be needed if one is to fully answer our above questions.

In closing, I should note that the essays' general criticism of western ethics is an attack against a straw man. One weakness of many of these essays is that they fall into the trap of thinking that the entirety of western ethics sees man as an isolated individual in search of pursuing his own self-interest. This—certainly at odds with *ubuntu*—has also been criticized by many within the Western tradition. If we truly want to understand how the key concepts of African and western ethics can contribute to our moral lives, to our lives as global citizens, then the many perspectives of western ethics—and not the too simple articulation in this book—will be given their due alongside African ethics.

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